DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 034 263 CG 004 696

AUTHOR	Diamant, Louis
TITLE	Premarital Sexual Behavior, Attitudes, and Emotional Adjustment.
PUB DATE	69
NOTE	12p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.70
DESCRIPTORS	*Adjustment Problems, *College Students, *Emotional Maladjustment, Emotional Problems, *Permissive Environment, *Sexuality

ABSTRACT

Opinions vary as to whether the current "sexual revolution" with its acceptance of sexual permissiveness does or does not contribute to emotional maladjustment. In the fact of conflicting views this study was designed to test for the existence of a relationship between premarital sexual intercourse and emotional adjustment. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, the Attitude Scale on Sexual Permissiveness and a Sexual Behavior Questionnaire were administered to 116 male and female college students. No relationship was found between adjustment and premarital sexual intercourse for either male or female subjects nor was any relationship found between the numbers of partners and adjustment. The possible relationship in males between dissonant context as reflected in low scores on attitude scales on sexual permissiveness and adjustment was also investigated. As hypothesized low permissiveness scores were related to maladjustment in males. (Author/KJ)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED034263

Premarital Sexual Behavior, Attitudes, and Emotional Adjustment

Louis Diamant

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

CG 004 696

Premarital Sexual Behavior, Attitudes, and Emotional Adjustment

When Freud postulated relationships between sexual inhibition and neurosis, sex emerged from Victorian Europe as a prime factor in the study of personality development and disturbance. Since that time psychoanalysts and many of the literati have theorized and written within the framework of Freud's psychosexual model, and after more than fifty years of undoubted Freudian influence there has evolved in America an era which has been labeled the "Sexual Renaissance" (Reiss, 1966).

Reiss in reviewing certain aspects of contemporary sexual behavior and attitudes indicates that there are trends toward greater premarital sexual permissiveness, acceptance of sex without guilt, and a freedom of choice concerning a premarital sex code.

In recent articles, however, both a noted psychologist and psychiatrist have raised storm warnings regarding contemporary sexual behavior. Halleck (1967) addressing physicians

in the Journal of the American Medical Association writes that ambiguities and doubts involved in premarital sexual intercourse have been increased by the new sexual attitudes and that stresses associated with ambiguities in sustaining or choosing premarital intercourse may have a deleterious effect upon female students. Halleck points to surveys revealing that 86 per cent of the University of Wisconsin female students who were seeing psychiatrists have engaged in premarital sexual intercourse as compared to 22 per cent of non-patient students. Although he warns not to conclude that permissive sexual behavior is universally dangerous, he does suggest that permissive sexual behavior can potentiate mental illness and supports this hypothesis with case studies. May (1966) also discusses the dilemma of the sexual enlightenment. He sees a reduction of societal anxiety but an increase in internal anxiety and guilt. He describes patients who talk a great deal about sexual activity and who in contrast to the Victorians feel guilty when not performing sexually. These patients have almost no complaint about prohibition of their sexual freedom but do complain of lack of feeling or passion.

With important contributions to the literature promulgating conflicting views, the need for clarification through quantitative data becomes apparent. Therefore, the primary task

of this study will be to test for the existence of a relationship between premarital sexual intercourse and emotional adjustment. A second goal of the research is to test a hypothesis that a dissonant sexual context is related to emotional maladjustment in male students. Rosenberg (1962) described contextual dissonance as a situation in which the individual's social characteristics differ from those of the population by which he is surrounded. Using measurements of self-esteem, psychosomatic symptoms and depressive affect, he found he could relate emotional maladjustment to a dissonant religious context. It is generally granted that in the United States the culture has permitted greater freedom of sexual expression for men than for women. E's clinical experience indicates that a highly restricted sexual attitude is consonant with emotional maladjustment in male students. Therefore, it is stated that a restricted attitude toward sex would represent a dissonant sexual context and, by generalizing from Rosenberg, related to emotional maladjustment. Specifically, it is hypothesized that there will be a greater incidence of maladjustment among male college students who show a dissonant sexual context as indicated by a low score on the Attitude Scale of Sexual Permissiveness. The relationship of emotional adjustment to sexual attitudes will also be investigated for female Ss.

METHOD

Subjects

The Ss were 116 undergraduate students (54 males, 62 females), ages 19-25, enrolled in upper level courses at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Since a volunteer group in a study related to sex might be considered a special group, each class was told of the importance of the study and all the students were asked to participate, resulting in total participation in selected classes.

Procedure

The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, the Attitude Scale on Sexual Permissiveness (Reiss, 1964), and the Sexual Behavior Questionnaire were administered in three separate sessions. To encourage valid responses to the sex attitude and behavior assessments the subjects were assured anonymity and to this effect strict safeguards were demonstrated in the distribution, collection and scoring of the measurements. Preliminary use of the Sexual Behavior Questionnaire with the general student population showed the reported incidence of premarital sexual intercourse to be not below the level of expectancy provided by other researchers (Kinsey, et al., 1948; Ehrmann, 1959; Kinsey, et al., 1953; Freedman, 1965; Grinder and Schmidt, 1966), and thus did not indicate a reluctance to report this behavior. Reiss (1964) offers evidence of validity for the Attitude Scale on Sexual Permissiveness.

The Attitude Scale is composed of 12 items ranging from "kissing when engaged" to "full sexual relations without affections." The Sexual Behavior Questionnaire included age, age at which premarital sexual behavior began, and number of premarital sexual partners. The MMPI profiles were evaluated at the University Counseling Center[1] and were sorted into three categories: Nonsymptomatic (N), Symptomatic but not clinical (S), and Clinical (C). Category N included those diagnostic profiles which were felt to be the profiles of well-adjusted persons not in need of psychological help. Category S included those diagnostic profiles indicating some signs of tension but which would not ordinarily suggest a need for treatment and upon which a clinical diagnostic label would not be placed. In Category C were placed those profiles which represented clinical diagnosis which ordinarily suggest a need for psychotherapy. A test for interrater reliability, using the ratings of a second psychologist, was made on thse evaluations and showed statistically reliable at the .001 level.

RESULTS

The mean age of the male Ss was 21.78 years and the mean age for initial premarital sexual intercourse among males was 18.09 years. The mean age of the female Ss was 20.63 years and

the mean age for initial premarital sexual intercourse was 18.52 years.

Forty-three per cent of the males were in Category N, 22 per cent in Category S, and 35 per cent in Category C. Fifty-nine per cent of the male Ss had experienced premarital sexual intercourse. Of these, 20 per cent reported one premarital sexual partner, 19 per cent reported one to five partners and 20 per cent reported more than five partners.

Of the female Ss 42 per cent were in Category N, 39 per cent in Category S and 19 per cent in Category C. Forty-seven per cent of the females reported premarital intercourse, of which 26 per cent had one premarital sexual partner, 11 per cent had two or three partners and 10 per cent had more than three premarital sexual partners.

None of the chi-square tests showed a significant relationship between premarital sexual behavior and emotional adjustment as indicated by the MMPI profiles for males or females. The relationships were first tested by using the 2 X 3 contingency table in which adjustment Categories N, S, and C were separated. When no significance was found, the Categories S and C were combined and the chi-square repeated. No differences were found in separate tests for Ss having no premarital sexual partners, fewer than three partners, or more than three partners (in males, more than 5).

No significant results were found for the female Ss (n = 42) on chi-square tests for relationships between the upper and lower third of the attitude scores and adjustment using adjustment categories S and C combined. For male Ss (n = 36), significantly greater maladjustment was found for low attitude Ss than for high attitude Ss (chi-square = 6.12, df = 1, $p < .02$).

DISCUSSION

The results of this investigation indicated that in the current non-psychiatric college population Ss there were no differences in emotional adjustment in either male or female students between those who had and those who had not had premarital sexual intercourse. This tended to support a finding by Freedman (1965) in which he noted no significant differences on separate MMPI T-scores between those female students that had had premarital sexual intercourse and those that had not. Since Halleck's psychiatric population of University of Wisconsin female students showed a higher percentage of premarital sexual intercourse than the non-psychiatric student population, other variables must be examined before conclusions can be drawn. Clinical experience indicated that patients tended to show more than average excesses or inhibition of sexual or other social behavior. At any rate in this study, when no variables other than premarital sexual intercourse were considered, no relationship with maladjustment was seen and in this respect the data provided no basis for assuming such a relationship. The greater degree of maladjustment found among the male Ss showing low permissiveness raised

some doubt as to the amount of freedom students have in choosing a sexual code.

The female Ss participated in or abstained from premarital sexual intercourse, chose none, one, or several partners, were permissive or restricted in their sexual attitudes and showed no evidence of maladjustment. Men it seemed could elect sexual intercourse or not with no penalty, but a restricted sexual attitude seemed related to emotional maladjustment. The findings indicated, surprisingly enough, that in this college population women may have in one respect more sexual choice than men.

In concluding it was noted that the percentage of female subjects in the current study reporting premarital sexual intercourse was approximately twice that found by Freedman (1965) or by Halleck (1967) in his non-psychiatric group. A comparison of the female Ss with Freedman's showed marked difference in socio-economic backgrounds. A survey of the female student population from which the current Ss were drawn indicated that 55 per cent were children of working class fathers whose occupations ranged from unskilled labor to skilled. Freedman reported almost no daughters of workers among his Ss at an eastern women's college. Although Kinsey (1953) considered educational groups as social groups with different sexual behavior, it seems that in studying sexual or other psychosocial patterns of American college students today, clarification requires socio-economic delimitations.

SUMMARY

A number of writers have concerned themselves with the permissive sexual attitudes of American college students, presenting different evaluations of the sexual changes in American life. Opinions vary as to whether the current "sexual revolution" with its acceptance of sexual permissiveness does or does not contribute to emotional maladjustment.

In the face of conflicting appraisals, the current research investigated relationships between sexual behavior, attitudes on sexual permissiveness, and adjustment. MMPI's, Attitude Scales on Sexual Permissiveness and Sexual Behavior Questionnaires were administered to 116 male and female college students. No relationship was found between adjustment and premarital sexual intercourse for either male or female S's nor was any relationship found between the number of partners and adjustment. The possible relationship in males between dissonant context as reflected in low scores on attitude scales on sexual permissiveness and adjustment was also investigated. As hypothesized, low permissiveness scores were related to maladjustment in males.

References

Ehrmann, W. Premarital dating behavior. New York: Holt, 1959.

Freedman, M. B. The sexual behavior of American college women. Merrill Palmer Quarterly, 1965, 11, 33-48.

Grinder, R. E. and Schmidt, S. S. Coeds and contraceptive information. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1966, 28, 471-479.

Halleck, Seymour L. Sex and mental health on the campus. Journal of the American Medical Association, 1967, 200, 684-690.

Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., and Martin, C. E. Sexual behavior in the human male. Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948.

Kinsey, C., and Gebhard, P. H. Sexual behavior in the human female. Philadelphia: Saunders, 1953.

May, Rollo. Anecdotes for the new puritanism. Saturday Reveiw, 1966, 49, 19-20.

Reiss, Ira L. The scaling of premarital sexual permissiveness. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1964, 26, 188-198.

_____ The sexual renaissance: a survey and analysis. Journal of Social Issues, 1966, 22, 123-137.

Rosenberg, Morris. The dissonant religious context and emotional disturbance. The American Journal of Sociology, 1962, 68, 1-10.

Footnotes

[1]The author wishes to thank Dr. Ronald B. Simono, Director of the Counseling Center for his assistance.